

Appeals court extends stay on same sex marriage

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

Same sex marriage in Mississippi was put on hold indefinitely when a three-judge panel of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit in New Orleans on Dec. 4 granted a stay until the case can be

heard in conjunction with similar appeals from Texas and Louisiana.

When U.S. District Judge Carlton W. Reeves in Jackson on Nov. 25 struck down Mississippi's constitutional amendment decreeing marriage should be between one man and one woman, he also granted a two-week stay while Mississippi Governor Phil Bryant and

Attorney General Jim Hood prepared an appeal to the Fifth Circuit.

Before the Fifth Circuit's Dec. 4 order effectively extending the stay, there was the real possibility that Mississippi's circuit clerks would be forced to issue marriage licenses to same sex couples at the end of Carlton's two-week stay of his ruling.

James E. Graves Jr., writing for the three-judge appeals panel, stated, "We have little difficulty concluding that the legal questions presented by this case are serious, both to litigants involved and the public at large, and that a substantial question is presented for this court to resolve."

"In reaching the merits of this appeal, this court will be confronted with a potential conflict between the state's historic 'power and authority over marriage' and 'the constitutional rights of persons' to make decisions in the most

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YEC planned for Dec. 29-30

Annual
event to
promote
student
fellowship

By William H. Perkins Jr.
Editor

There's still more than enough time to make plans to attend the Youth Evangelism Challenge (YEC) on Dec. 29-30 at A.E. Wood Coliseum on the campus of Mississippi College in Clinton, according to the chief organizer of the annual event.

"As a matter of fact, participants can register at the door when they get there," said Don Lum, evangelism director for the Mississippi Baptist Convention Board (MBCB) in Jackson. "We expressly design YEC so Christian students can be around people just like them - Christian students - during their break from school. It's also a great time for students to bring their friends, especially those who need to hear the Gospel presented."

Speakers include Dan Lanier, senior pastor of Northcrest Church in Meridian, and Ed Newton, evangelist from Orlando, Fl. Worship through music will be provided by the Cassidy Crenshaw Band of New Orleans. Illusionist Drew Worsham from Pullman, Wa.,

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THE GREAT KING OVER ALL THE EARTH

A WEESOME GOD

★ ★ ★ ★ ★

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MISSISSIPPI COLLEGE

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Pastor killed in Florida church

BRADENTON, Fla. (BP and local reports) — A suspect has been arrested in the shooting deaths of a Florida Baptist pastor at his church, the suspect's wife who was a church staffer, and the suspect's BATTLE neighbor.

Andres "Andy" Avalos, a suspect in the murders, was arrested Tuesday.



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From the editor

WILLIAM PERKINS

A symbol of our own

Symbols are powerful objects to people, and always have been. From the beginnings of human history, when people piled stones one upon the other to mark significant places and events, to the Colossus of Rhodes, to the World Trade Towers, symbols compel us to remember the past, move us to action in the present, and give us hope for a bright future.

Great movements have almost always included important symbols. Who can forget Lady Liberty in Tiananmen Square, or our own Statue of Liberty on which Lady Liberty was based? The Great Seal of the United States, with its bald eagle clutching among its talons both arrows for war and olive branches for peace, is recognized all over the world. (A trivia question: In which direction does the eagle's head face? Answer: To the right toward the olive branches, to symbolize the nation's preference for peace.)

Symbols have of course been misused through the ages, too. The swastika, for over 3,000 years the symbol of good luck in many cultures around the world, was adopted by Adolf Hitler and the Nazi Party in the 1930s to capture the essence of their ruinous march toward war and mass murder. It has never recovered its original meaning.

Christians have their symbols, too, the most consequential being the cross upon which our Lord and Savior died to save each one of us. Scholars and other folks have argued for many years (and continue to do so) over the exact composition and configuration of the cross, but its influence and meaning to billions of people over the past 2,000 years is not arguable.

If Southern Baptists have a symbol to call our own, it would be the image of Lottie Moon and the ideals she embodied. One of the first Southern Baptist missionaries to be commissioned to China in 1873, her passion for helping bring lost souls to salvation in that country is legendary even to non-Southern Baptist Christians.

Lottie lived among the Chinese people for 40 years. She was known far and wide, by both friend and foe alike, as the Heavenly Book Visitor because of her unshakable faith in and firm reliance upon the Bible. She loved the Chinese people with all her heart — especially the women and children.

She loved them so much that, when the time came, she was willing to lay down her life for them. Famine came to China, and she was so committed to the people that she gave away all her money and food so others could eat.

Finally, on a ship in the harbor of Kobe, Japan, that was returning her to America, she died of malnutrition on Christmas Eve of 1912. She weighed 50 pounds.

The world little noted her life and passing, but Southern Baptists have never forgotten her. Her spiritual passion and personal sacrifice for the cause of Christ has come to symbolize our dedication to helping fulfill the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20). Her selflessness epitomizes for us the image of Christ in ourselves, and calls us to be as single-minded as Lottie when it comes to the prospect of helping to bring the world to Jesus.

It is fitting that Lottie Moon has become such a powerful symbol for Southern Baptists. She dedicated her life to others and eventually died for them. How much closer to the model of Jesus could any one of us get?

As the December emphasis for this year's Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions approaches the midway point and we all seek the Lord's guidance on the amount we will give, know that every penny of the offering goes directly to the field to support the Southern Baptists who are there, just as Lottie was there all those many years ago. Let us hold high the symbol of Lottie not only as we give of our resources, but as we also give of our lives to help save the world.

Most importantly, let us hold Jesus Christ highest of all. Lottie wouldn't want it any other way.



A real eye-opener

Word began circulating around our community that our city council was considering an ordinance promoting the LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) agenda. Instead of relying on others' reports, my wife and I along with our eighth-grade daughter decided to attend the next council meeting here in Fayetteville, Ar.

It was quite an eye-opener. After a civil discussion by nearly everyone about an overreaching and broad LGBT ordinance, that portion of the meeting was ending. Then a councilwoman, commenting on the pastors and other Christians who spoke against the ordinance, shared her thoughts. "I am ashamed," she said, "that there is so much darkness in the hearts of this community."

Her comments set an uncivil tone for many of the promoters of this ordinance. It would not be enough to disagree. All opposition must be smeared.

How, then, should followers of Christ respond when our elected local government works to legalize and promote immorality while publicly attacking people faithful to Christ and His Word? Let's move forward with:

■ Clarity. Our objections to bad public policy need to be presented as coherently and persuasively as possible. How will we encourage sympathetic city council members or city residents, much less those who are ambivalent or opposed to our view, to vote against bad legislation if we do not give them a reason?

For example, the Fayetteville ordinance prohibits churches from refusing to hire as a receptionist, childcare worker, custodian, or any other "secular" position an individual who is transgendered. If a complaint is filed, the church/pastor could be charged with a criminal violation of the ordinance. Proponents of the law dismiss the charges as "only" a third-degree misdemeanor.

Yet, it is not reasonable for a church, pastor, or any other Christian in the community to be charged with a crime for living in obedience to their faith. Would a Sikh man be required to shave his beard? Would a Muslim woman be required to eat pork? Why, then, would Christians be required to accept homosexual behavior?

■ Compassion. When our words, attitudes, and actions about divisive and diffi-



Guest opinion
with Douglas Falknor

cult issues consistently reflect grace and love, God uses our obedience during adversity to grow us and others to be more like Jesus. Instead of speaking words which are cunning, crafty, and scheming, the Bible instructs, "...speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in every way into him who is the head, into Christ" (Ephesians 4:15).

My heart must continually grow to be like Jesus so I will see each person like He sees them. Only when the love of Christ for others fills my life can I show His compassion for every person.

Words have meaning, and poorly chosen words can convey un-Christlike attitudes and wound the spirit. The goal should be to "Let your speech always be gracious, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how you ought to answer each person" (Colossians 4:6).

Showing compassion to each person will not result in everyone saying nice things about us. We may still be slandered and attacked. Jesus was, Paul was, and we will be. We will need to develop a thick skin while revealing a compassionate heart.

■ Christ. The real problem in my city is not elected officials who attack our worldview or bad laws attacking religious freedom while purporting to protect rights. The real problem is people bound by sin. We are all "by nature children of wrath" (Ephesians 2:3). In every way, then, we must proclaim the excellencies of Jesus who called us "out of darkness into his marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9).

We do not choose between involvement in the public square to defeat bad laws or preaching Christ. We proclaim Jesus through every endeavor. As we work in the public square, our focus remains on pointing people to Jesus. Christ alone can change the hearts and minds of each person and even the direction of an entire community.

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'Scripture planting' in heart languages yields successes

EAST ASIA (BP) — Along the side of a muddied mountain path, four East Asian believers sit under the shade of tall bamboo with a small, stooped woman in the traditional dress of her minority people group.

The sounds of a radio program ring out from an MP3 player stowed in one of their backpacks, and her eyes light up as she listens to Bible stories told in her mother tongue. It is not common that a radio program would be broadcast in her language. Her Iron Pea (name changed) people group speaks six dialects, each distinct and all incomprehensible to those who speak the national majority's trade language.

The four believers are translators, working to interpret the book of Luke into the woman's dialect. Once a month they travel into the community, testing what they have translated while also witnessing to people.

Back in the city, a headphone-clad Li Chang (name changed) sits at a large Mac computer watching audio levels bounce up and down on the screen. Luo Jie (name changed) sits on a stool in the next room, carefully reading a passage from 1 Corinthians into a microphone. These small rooms have been transformed into a makeshift recording studio, complete with mattresses leaning against the walls as sound-deadening panels.

The ministry of Li Chang, an Iron Pea believer, is to record the radio program that played from that MP3 player in the mountains. Luo Jie is an Iron Pea believer who often provides voice recordings. Together with International Mission Board (IMB) missionaries, other national believers, and Christian partners, they are recording Scripture and resources in the Iron Peas' heart language including oral Bible stories, original worship songs, and testimonies.

All this culminates in a new method of ministry called "Scripture planting."

Heart value

Scripture planting was developed by IMB missionaries in East Asia working to reach minority people groups like the Iron Peas with the Good News of Jesus. Scripture planting integrates the crafting of oral Bible stories with real-time church planting, evangelism, and discipleship. This provides quicker development of resources such as worship songs and recorded testimonies, as well as Bible translation.

At its core is the use of heart language, "the language in which identity, values, core beliefs, and so forth — including religion — are typically learned, acquired [and] held," said Grant Lovejoy, IMB director of orality strategies.

Both Jon Gerwig (name changed) and Bradford Wotzke (name changed) moved to East Asia with their families in 2004, becoming some of the first IMB missionaries to work with the Iron Peas in this city. The people group of more than three million had no known churches and only a handful of believers.

The Iron Peas, who primarily worship the spirits of their ancestors, are considered an "unreached people group," mean-

ing less than two percent of them are evangelical Christians.

In the past, this country's majority people group oppressed the Iron Peas, resulting in violent battles. Most retreated high in the mountains, where their poverty level is high and their education level is low, to eke out a secluded living as farmers. Tension still exists between the groups, and many Iron Pea people, particularly women and children, do not speak the trade language.

"You're just spinning your wheels if you're not reaching the people in the language of their heart," Gerwig said, "so you want to reach women, you want to reach children, you want to reach people in their moment of need in their heart? It has to be in their heart language."

Getting started

As Gerwig, Wotzke, and other IMB missionaries began working with the Iron Peas in 2004, they planned to utilize Scripture resources — biblical stories and other materials that foster evangelism, discipleship and church planting — in their ministry.

However, not many Iron Pea language resources were available at the time, so they had to be developed. With the help of local believers, one of the first resources they translated was the Creation to Christ story, a 10-minute chronological story that explains the Gospel simply.

An important development came in 2005, when a Great Commission Christian partner completed the Iron Pea New Testament. The Old Testament translation has been underway since. The Bible is necessary to grow the church and believers, Wotzke emphasized, but getting the entire Bible into a heart language typically takes several decades.

"We can't wait 40 years," Wotzke said. "How many people die every day in that people group? How many people are dying over that number of years?"

Bo (name changed), an Iron Pea believer and translator, explained they once thought they must have the entire Bible translated before they could use it, but they now take a more practical approach.

"We considered our translation work like cooking for different sets of guests," Bo said. "...Some guests may be very busy and cannot wait for the entire meal. We must cook our dish (the translation work), finish each dish, and let each group of guests come, eat, and leave."

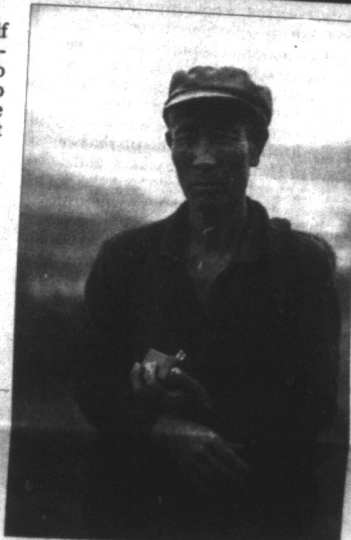
From the inside

The missionaries' ministry goal is not just to see new Iron Pea believers or even new disciples, but to see new churches started.

"We know that no matter how well we adapt culturally to the lifestyle here, how well we understand their culture, we will always be an outsider," Gerwig said, "and for there to be a movement, a massive movement of multiple churches being started, thousands upon thousands of Iron Peas coming to faith, it's going to take that Gospel message coming from an insider."



PLANTING SEEDS — After giving a Bible and basic medical items to a man (center) passing alongside a road, East Asian Christians converse with him in the local dialect specific to that region. These Christians are translating parts of the Bible into this dialect, and once a month they travel into the community to test what they have translated while also witnessing to people. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)



PRECIOUS GIFT — On a roadside in East Asia, an ethnic minority man holds a new radio given to him by John Edgebury (name changed), an International Mission Board media specialist and volunteer. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)

Finding that first insider was difficult. For 16 months, Gerwig and his team did not see any Iron Pea people come to faith. During that time, though, more resources were being created to reach Iron Peas. In 2005, the missionaries developed the idea of a radio program filled with Gospel-centered content and broadcast in the Iron Pea language.

With the help of several Great Commission Christian organizations and national partners, the radio show premiered in 2007. Missionaries, nationals, and volunteers from the U.S. trekked through Iron Pea areas to help build the program's audience, handing out radios and teaching villagers how to tune into the radio broadcast each night.

Their strategy now includes equipping volunteers and other non-Iron Pea speakers with MP3 players loaded with the Creation to Christ story. "Anybody, whether you have any language or not, can walk into an Iron Pea village, turn the speaker set on... and 10 minutes later, people have heard the story," Gerwig said.

Finally in 2006, Gerwig saw the first believer among the people group, a man named Solomon (name changed) who became an outspoken witness in his community.

By 2007, there were nine believers in his village. A few months later, 80 from his village and 60 from another had put their faith in Jesus. Over the next several months, Gerwig and his team trained these new believers in a basic, short-term discipleship plan and in late 2007, the first church among the Iron Pea people was started.

Since that church was established, the Gospel has spread throughout Iron Pea communities. Multiple second-generation churches, which are churches started by Solomon's church, and several third generation churches have now been started.

Today, there are 28 churches and approximately 3,000 believers among the Iron Peas.

Bright future

Now is a unique time in the Iron Pea people's history, Gerwig said. "There are more Iron Pea believers seeking to reach the Iron Peas, and that's something that's never happened before."

Iron Pea believers are an integral part of developing Scripture resources, producing the radio program, and strategizing ways to reach their own people.

Gerwig said he is thankful God has allowed him and his team to be a part of this and believes that future missionaries to this people group will come from among the people group itself. The team's vision is that by 2020, each of the six Iron Pea dialect groups will have at least four generation churches among them.

Others can be a part of the effort to share the Gospel with unreached people groups like the Iron Peas around the world, Gerwig noted. "When you give to the Lottie Moon Christmas (Offering), you are helping to plant churches among the Iron Pea people. There's no way around that at all, nor should there be," he said. "Your money helps start churches."

Without question Jesus Christ is the centerpiece of Christmas. Rightly so, for through the centuries it was for Him that all of humanity, scarred by sin and wrecked by their own ruinous lifestyle, longed for someone who could come and change life for them. It was Jesus and He is what Christmas is all about. It is Jesus who is the focus of the praise of heaven at Christmas. It is Jesus who Mary and Joseph had been given information that this is the one who everyone had longed for. It is Jesus. It is Jesus that the Heavenly Father would arrange the celestial bodies themselves so that wise men could find their way to bring him gifts. It is Jesus who was prophesied for hundreds of years, that He would take our sins upon Him and pay our eternal debt for the curse. It is Jesus who is the centerpiece of Christmas.

There are other characters in the Christmas story. Some who we are introduced to and others that we just kind of see at a glance. Shepherds who received the announcement at Christmas, wise men who saw the star, political leaders who were shaken in their soul when they heard about another ruler coming, and maybe the one person who gets more attention than any of those is the unnamed inn keeper who we assume told Mary and Joseph there wasn't any room in the inn.

But probably the best known unknown man at Christmas is Joseph. He's always around in the Christmas scenes, a part of the manger gatherings. People know his name but rarely give a second thought to this guy who was the earthly picture of father to Jesus. In my office there is a manger scene that was given to me by a friend. It stays out all year all the time. It is a blown glass representation of Jesus, Mary, Joseph, and the wise men. Sometime during this year someone knocked Joseph off of his place and broke him into several parts. There I found him, broken, dismembered, shattered. I put him back with the manger scene and just left him there in his broken condition because who really cares about Joseph anyway?

In fact in the Scripture, at best, he's a passing thought. He's mentioned in Matthew and Luke in the birth stories and even in the one account we have when Jesus was twelve and went to the temple. He hardly gets a mention in Mark or John. Beside that somewhere along the line and we do not actually know what happened, but he seems to be off the scene causing people to speculate that somewhere before Jesus' death, somewhere before His ministry began, possibly Joseph died and



The Forgotten Man of Christmas

Mary was alone and Jesus was without His earthly father.

Mary, of course, receives a great deal of attention as the mother of Jesus. The other characters seem to find their place in the story, but other than just fill in the blank name of Joseph, he's pretty much forgotten. Can you imagine as God the Father was sending His Son to this earth entrusting Him to the hands and the heart of a couple to raise the Son of God what kind of care and thought went through the heart of God that He would choose Mary and a man named Joseph? What kind of guy is he? From what we see in Scripture there are only a few things that we can glean from and discover about him.

Joseph was a committed man. Now the reason I know that is because of his relationship with Mary. He was committed to her. In fact Luke says that they were going to Bethlehem to register because of taxation and he went with Mary his espoused wife. We, in our culture, find it hard to get our minds around the marriage practices of that day. Some have translated that as betrothed, others have translated that as engaged, both of which are probably lacking in understanding of the practices of that day in Judaism about marriage.

To be betrothed or engaged in their sense was a total commitment of life in a relationship with the other one. It wasn't a flippant or thoughtless, flirtatious, love-like affair. No, when you took this step in society in relationship to another, you were committed to her and she to you. That is their relationship. Some have tried to describe it in this fashion that this betrothal or significant engagement was the equivalent of the marriage commitment

taking place with a man and a woman in a ceremony today. It was that serious, that deep in commitment, that profound before God. The wedding became the outward celebration and expression between the couple, when in fact before God, they were a union. It was a serious thing and Joseph was committed to her.

She, under the law, could not be unfaithful to him nor he unfaithful to her, but something had happened that was out of the ordinary for she was expecting a baby. He had every right to walk away from her. He had reason to simply follow the practice of ditching this marriage and going on with his life. He did not do that. He was a man of such character and commitment that he would love her and believe in her even when she told him of something that had never before happened in his story. Today if there were more men and women who would come to the altar of love with that kind of commitment, what a difference it would make. What a difference it would make in our spouses if we were committed and loved that way and what a difference it would make in us if we were those type men or women.

Joseph was also confident. In fact when you begin to see what happened in his life and what he saw, heard and experienced, you begin to realize that his commitment was built on a confidence that he had with God. In what way does the Bible reveal this? There were dreams that came to him where an angel of God spoke and said, "Do not be afraid to take Mary home as your wife" (Matt. 1:20). He believed it and he was right.

There were the people who were searching for Jesus when He came. Can

you imagine those wise men that stopped in Jerusalem and talked to the biblical scholars who told them to go to Bethlehem and you'll find what the Scripture says, and they came. Can you imagine how Joseph must have felt and processed these men bringing their gifts, following the star, and Scripture? What an affirmation. Then as trouble was about to break out as the regional ruler was going to kill babies because of the fear that they had that another ruler was going to take over, so again, God spoke to Joseph in a dream to take Mary and the babe to Egypt.

Just consider how important Joseph really is. That he would have enough confidence in God to lead him that he would go even further away from home in order to be obedient to the Lord. I wonder how many earthly fathers there would be who would care enough about wife and child and relationship to God that they would confidently do what seems so strange and yet it was the perfect will of God. For many of us, and I really need to speak for me, we're so reluctant just doing what the Lord asked us to do, going where it may be difficult or unusual or even strange, being obedient to God when everything seems to be abnormal about it.

A final thought about this forgotten man, Joseph was caring. The Bible does not have anything bad to say about Joseph. He's concerned along with Mary as Jesus was left behind in Jerusalem at twelve. He is always attentive and supportive even as they travel and the birth took place under less than ideal circumstances. What a caring man he must have been. God selecting Mary, the handmaiden of the Lord, as the Bible describes her. What an amazing lady she must have been, but I feel certain that Joseph was that kind of considerate, thoughtful, caring man that was needed in the relationship.

As a result of that wonderful couple, you and I celebrate His coming for all of us while the Scripture says of Mary, "But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart" (Luke 2:19). Turning them over and over and looking at them from a different vantage point, she pondered them. I must say that I believe, too, that His daddy, who was honored to step into the physical earthly role of being father to the Son of God, was used and blessed of God and did God's bidding magnificently. This Christmas while we look at the centerpiece, Jesus, we give thanks for Mary and for Joseph.

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Staff Changes

► Yale Street Church, Cleveland, has called Gabby Hays as pastor.

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Sudan government confiscates churches, arrests believers

NORTH KHARTOUM, Sudan (BP) — The government of Sudan has accelerated its persecution of Christians since mid-November, confiscating church grounds and beating and arresting believers in at least three attacks in North Khartoum, Morning Star News has reported.

On Dec. 2, armed police in nine vehicles broke through the main gate of Khartoum Bahri Evangelical Church and compound, beating everyone they encountered. Officers surrounded the complex, preventing anyone from fleeing or entering, and beat and arrested 38 Christians for refusing to surrender their property to the government, sources told Morning Star News.

Victims requested prayer from Christians worldwide, and defended their faith with strong resolve. "We have enjoyed worshipping and praising God in prison," one victim said. "The power of God was present among us; let the name of God be praised and glorified from now and evermore."

The Christians were released on the same day of their arrest, sentenced to pay fines of \$250 each. At least two Christians were beaten severely, witnesses reported, including church elder Daud Basair and a female Christian who was rushed to the hospital.

Police first attacked the church Nov. 17-18, bulldozing a church wall and destroying several homes, one of which belonged to a Christian school, Nile Theological College. Police destroyed the home of pastor Hafiz Fasaha and destroyed two other buildings that housed church youth. No deaths were reported, but Fasaha is said to be missing.

Bashir had appealed to the international Christian community for help. "This is a case of serious persecution of the church in Sudan," Morning Star News quoted Bashir. "We appeal to the international community of the Christian body to stand with us and to advocate for our case. The forces of evil cannot prevail against the church of Christ."

In the November bulldozer attacks, National Intelligence and Security Services personnel and police wielded a court order demanding the church surrender its land and buildings to a Muslim businessman, Khalid Mustafa, who claimed to have bought the property from a church committee — but the committee had been appointed by Sudanese government officials who have worked since 2011 to impose sharia law and end Christianity in Sudan.

"The government recently installed some committee to the running of the church, and these are the same people who want to sell the church for business purposes," Morning Star News quoted pastor Daud Fadul, who called the group a "government puppet committee."

Boisterous young men attempted to defend the building, according to witnesses, and church women wailed and screamed, forcing police to temporarily retreat. When officers returned hours later, hundreds of Christians had formed a human shield around the church.

"Kill us before destroying our church property," the Christians told police. "We are ready to die or to be arrested."

"We cannot allow our church building to be taken by force," Morning Star News quoted another Christian.

Days later, Nov. 24, police arrested five church leaders for refusing to surrender the property, but released them the same night. Church leaders say they hold ownership papers on the property, and have led their congregations in concert prayer and fasting for their ownership rights to prevail.

In earlier attacks this year, police demolished other church buildings, including property owned by the Sudanese Church of Christ in the Thiba Al Hamyida area of North Khartoum and the Sudanese Church of Christ building in Omdurman, and shut down the Khartoum Christian Center that housed the Sudan Pentecostal Church, Morning Star News reported.

Harassment, arrests, and persecution of Christians have intensified since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, when Sudan President Omar al-Bashir adopted a stricter version of Islamic law that recognizes only Islamic culture, the Muslim religion, and the Arabic language.

Sudan has expelled foreign Christians and bulldozed church buildings, asserting that they belonged to South Sudan, and has threatened to kill Christians who refuse to leave the country.

In April 2013, the Sudanese Minister of Guidance and Endowments announced that no new licenses would be granted for church construction, claiming a decrease in the number of Christians.

The U.S. State Department has designated Sudan a Country of Particular Concern, citing the country's Christian persecution and other human rights violations.



FAITH FRIENDS — Linda Hamfors (right) and Anissa Haney sing together. Hamfors, a singer/songwriter, is a new believer who came to faith through her friendship with Anissa. Together, the young women wrote and performed a song for Sweden's National Peace Day. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)

Gospel music holds key to Stockholm mother's salvation

STOCKHOLM, Sweden (BP) — Good values weren't enough for Linda Hamfors of Stockholm, Sweden. Hamfors, who grew up in an atheist family, believed Jesus was "a really amazing guy" and learned values from her parents like forgiveness, acceptance, and love.

However, good values couldn't sustain the singer/songwriter through the tumultuous years when her parents began drinking more and pursuing materialistic gain. Feeling "left alone with my good values, I wasn't feeling good," Hamfors said.

Struggling with addiction herself, Hamfors searched for God. She found a church. She began singing in church, and the Gospel songs moved her to tears.

Then she heard International Mission Board (IMB) church planters Eric and Anissa Haney, also musicians, perform at an event in her city. They sang songs Anissa had written about life, hope and love. "[I write songs] about the value of life," Anissa said. "All the songs I've written in the last few years [are] about the value of life, how valuable you are to God, and that He has a purpose for your life."

The second time Hamfors heard the Haney's play during a street performance, the young woman "came over to me in tears, Anissa recalled. "She had all these questions and she wanted to get together sometime."

Hamfors said, "My mind was going, 'Oh, this is too much about Jesus and God,' but my heart was saying, 'Yes!'"

"Yes!" is an answer the Haney's know all too well. Eric describes the initial calling to international service as "a hurricane in our souls" — a deep stirring that drove

them to pray. The young musician told his wife, "Whatever this is, the answer is 'yes' to God."

That "Yes!" eventually led the Haney's and their three children to Stockholm. As the first IMB church planters in Sweden, they help start churches within a culture steeped in secularism and post-modern thought. They are funded through the Lottie Moon Christmas Offering for International Missions and the Cooperative Program, Southern Baptists' provision for missions and ministry service.

Charles Kridiotis, a church planter with the Simple Church network who partners with the Haney's, estimates that 3.5% of Swedes attend church. Of that, he says approximately 1.5% could be considered evangelical Christians.

"We have seen a little bit of growth in some places," Kridiotis said, "but even that little growth is not equivalent to the birth rate in this nation so in fact, the church is actually going backward."

Because Stockholm is a secular society and Swedes "just don't talk about God," Kridiotis and Eric agree that a small group approach to church planting is necessary.

"The resistance is not [toward] Jesus," Kridiotis said. "The resistance is what church is perceived to be in this nation." As a result, the strategy is simple: listening that leads to relationships that lead to biblical community and authentic small group worship.

"We really care about their stories," Eric said. "So their story leads to our story, which is God's story."

For the Haney's, music is the key to sharing their story and hearing the stories of those they meet. By recording the songs of

local musicians and interviewing them for a website designed to help singers and songwriters share their music, Eric has the opportunity to hear the stories of musicians and artists in Stockholm's creative community.

"I was at a party with one of the artists that we work with," Eric said. "I was sitting on the couch talking with [a guy who is a rapper]... He asked me specifically, 'Will you tell me how you came to know Jesus and what He's meant to you?'" Eric responded, "Of course I can!"

Approaching conversations about God through music has the ability to "cut through walls," Anissa said, noting the countless times people have approached them after a song and shared a piece of their story because the music moved them.

"Music has a power... to bring about healing... and to bring purpose and hope," Anissa said. "We play a lot of music in pubs and during open mic [events] so a lot of times we are the only believers there, the only little piece of light in the darkness."

The message of hope in Anissa's music is what drew Hamfors to approach Anissa after a street performance. "I felt like when you're really held by someone... like a mother who holds you," Hamfors said about the songs Anissa performed. "This was the feeling I had when I was listening and I was just crying."

A few days after they talked and exchanged cell phone numbers, Hamfors invited Anissa for lunch. The two women became friends. A few months later, Hamfors became a follower of Jesus. She now attends a couple of home groups where she says she is learning to forgive.

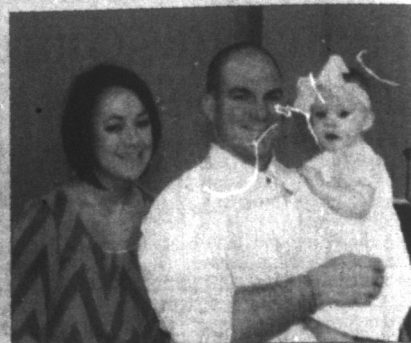
Just for the Record



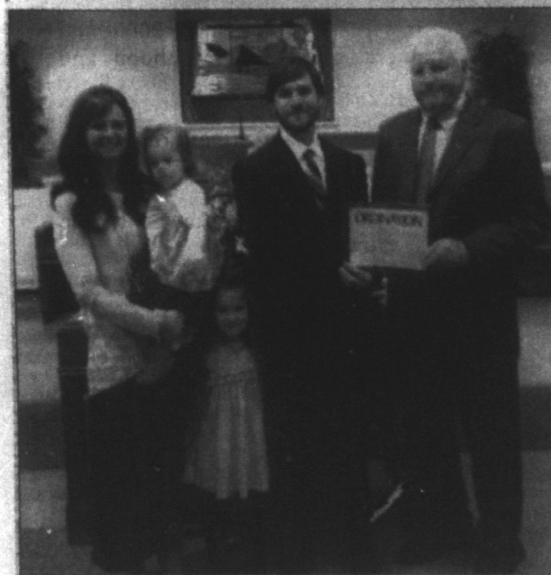
LIBERTY CHURCH, LIBERTY, ordained Mickey Goff as deacon Nov. 30. Shown are pastor Bradley Geno, Goff, and deacon chairman Gary Steen.



GOOD HOPE CHURCH, PHILADELPHIA, held a baby/parent dedication service recently. Shown, photo 1, are Jason and Dawn Haston with son, Blake; and, photo 2 Erik and Megan Alexander and daughter, Ayda Beth. Dudley Winstead, pastor, photo 1.



WEST END CHURCH, WEST POINT, ordained Gary Castle as deacon. Shown are Earl Clardy, Michael Castle, Gary and Rita Castle, pastor Chris Layton, and Charles Lifer.



FIRST CHURCH, ITTA BENA, held its Children in Action badge ceremony Nov. 23. Shown, front, are Hunter Watson, Neely Jordan, Michael Thomas, and Ashton Thomas; back, leader Regan McGlawn, Karle Aldridge, MacKenzie Pruett, Jessica Fulgham, and Emily Fulgham.

ROUNDAWAY CHURCH, DODDSVILLE, ordained Forrest Chandler as deacon Nov. 9. Shown, photo 1, are Arie, Ellie, Chandler, and pastor Bob Hill. The church also ordained Patrick Free; shown, photo 2, are Ashley, Anslee, Allie, Free, and Hill.



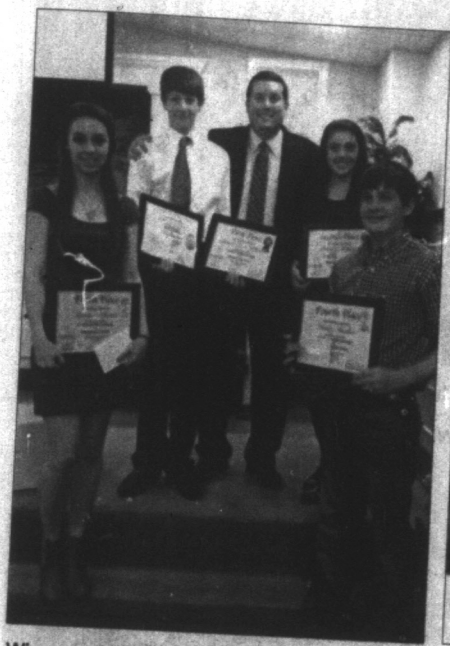
EPHESUS CHURCH, FOREST, held a note burning ceremony Nov. 16 for their family life center. Shown are Larry Driskell, Lamar Harrison, pastor Jim Everett, and Sibyl Gordy.

In other Church News:

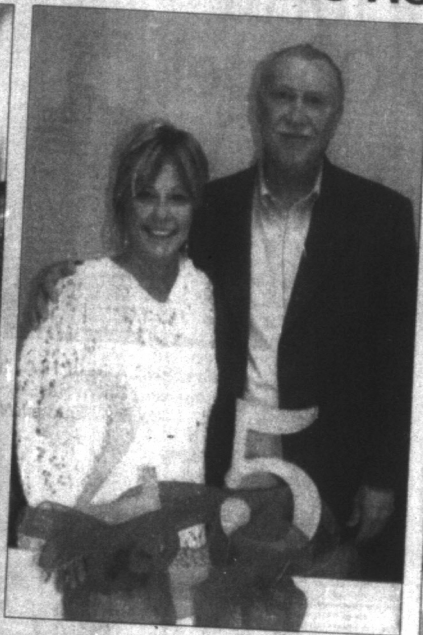
► **Reed's Chapel Church, Stewart**, honored Judy Upton White Oct. 26 for 19 years of service as secretary and treasurer. The church surprised her with gifts, cards, and a fellowship luncheon.

► **First Church, Stonewall**, is hosting Trevor and Sawyer Thomas with Trevor Thomas Drama Ministries Dec. 19, 7 p.m.

Just for the Record



Winners of the 2nd annual Bible Challenge at **GILLSBURG CHURCH, GILLSBURG**, are Lauren Williams, 3rd place; Dalton Williams, 1st place; youth minister Austin Bean; Madelyn Williams, 2nd place; and Bailey Hughes, 4th place. Dalton also received the highest attendance award.



Perry Sanderford celebrated 25 years as the Executive Director of Crossroads Counseling Center, a ministry of the **RANKIN ASSOCIATION**. A dinner was hosted at the association offices. Crossroads has five counseling offices in Pearl, Ridgeland, Clinton, Woodville, and Laurel. Sanderford is shown with his wife, Mary.



FIRST CHURCH, GLENDALE, ordained Earl Sanderson as deacon Nov. 9. Shown are pastor Jimmy Hill, Sanderson, and Tommy MacDermott.



EASTWOOD CHURCH, INDIANOLA, ordained Dennis Holmes as deacon. He is shown with his wife Merle and pastor Jeff Jeffers.



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Missionaries share local customs to spread Gospel

ABIDJAN, Ivory Coast (BP) — Dinner was a far cry from a Baptist church supper. On this night, six members from Valley Church in Searcy, Ar., squeezed into a modest home in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, of a Muslim family breaking their Ramadan fast.

The Arkansans ate by dipping their spoons into African groundnut stew and fish sauce served over attiéké, a couscous-like Ivorian food staple.

"Man, you could 'na told me 10 years ago I'd be over here eatin' with a Muslim," Paul Yingling said, with his southern accent and an incredulous shake of his head.

Yingling is an auto technician in Searcy, about an hour northeast of Little Rock. The Yinglings were part of a Valley Church volunteer team that first journeyed to Abidjan last year to see how their church might impact a West African city far away.

Welcome, dinner shared

The room is cramped on this summer evening. It's July and the hosts haven't eaten a bite or sipped a drink since before dawn. In a formal greeting in French, they tell the Baptists they are honored by their visit.

The small home belongs to a hospitable and dignified man named Seidou. He shares it with his immediate family along with a brother and his two wives. Seidou and his three brothers, all tall and stately, have gathered for the meal tonight. They, like many immigrants, came to Abidjan from Burkina Faso looking for work.

Two of the wives, dressed in vibrantly colored traditional gowns with matching scarves around their heads, serve the men and guests and then disappear back to the "kitchen" outside the front door.

Along with typical Ivorian dishes, Seidou pours traditional drinks. The Baptist volunteers tentatively sip bissap, a sweet ruby red drink made from dried hibiscus petals, and the more adventurous sample gimim, a beverage infused with so much fresh ginger that it delivers a spicy kick. Paul Yingling bravely drinks it down.

International Mission Board missionaries Mike McAfee and Heather McAfee and their children, Caleb, Karis, and Benjamin, are here as well, among more than 4,800 workers overseas supported by Southern Baptists' Lottie Moon Christmas Offering and Cooperative Program.

Churches needed

The McAfees, friends of Seidou's family, are urban church planters in Abidjan, the economic capital of the country. Its ever-

"We have been blessed with the fact that we have monetary resources but also the fact that we're free to worship, we're uninhibited, we can share the Gospel any way we want, but a lot of times we sit on the pew and we don't fulfill the Great Commission."

Paul Yingling
volunteer team missionary

growing population of at least six million reflects the diversity of West Africa. City dwellers speak 60 indigenous languages with French as the official language, a remnant of its colonial past.

Religious practices in the city reflect the same cultural milieu. Islam, Catholicism, and African tribal religions influence daily lives. Evangelicals are in the minority. Mike McAfee estimates there are about 30 small Baptist congregations in this city of millions, most with fewer than 100 members.

The McAfees wear many hats as they work with Ivorian churches and seek to establish new church plants in this sprawling metropolis. They train, they encourage, and they evangelize.

They also network and thus have turned to Southern Baptist churches such as Valley Church to partner in their labors.

On the church's first visit, the McAfees introduced the team of five women and one man to areas of the city where they saw potential for a church plant. The team worked with translators and members of the local Treichville Church to meet neighborhood residents and engage them with Bible stories.

New territory

One morning they ventured to Attécoubé, a community to the northwest of the central business district of Abidjan. To get there, they traveled up a rutted dirt road muddied by recent rains to where a Treichville church member named Mama Tra lives.

There, Mama Tra shared with them how she hoped a small plot of land she gave to the Lord could be the place for a new church. Then the team fanned out into the neighborhood to pray in homes and share Bible stories with those they met.

It was the first time Paul and Jan Yingling shared their faith

with a Muslim. Later, Paul Yingling described the dynamic of joining with the Treichville church to impact Abidjan.

"The believers here... want to reach this city for Christ. They are capable of sharing the Gospel. It just kind of helps that we're here. It kind of gets their foot in the door, you know... They love God and even though I'm a country boy from Arkansas, we're able to come together in one accord and share the Gospel for Christ."

"We have been blessed with the fact that we have monetary resources but also the fact that we're free to worship, we're uninhibited, we can share the Gospel any way we want, but a lot of times we sit on the pew and we don't fulfill the Great Commission."

At the mosque

Back at Seidou's home on that summer evening before dinner was served, Yingling had walked with his dinner hosts to the neighborhood mosque so that the men of the family could pray. He sat on a bench just outside the door of the mosque and watched the ritual.

"That was saddening to see them so dedicated to doing their work and praying... and the fact that they don't really know for sure that their sins are forgiven and where they'll stand with God on judgment day," Yingling recounts. "I've seen [Muslims] pray on TV and documentaries and things. It's sad there, but when you actually see it firsthand and you hear the call to prayer in Arabic, it moves you like you can't explain."

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TOGETHER FOR GOSPEL — International Mission Board missionary Mike McAfee (left) and George Kassou, pastor of Belleville Church in Abidjan, Ivory Coast, work together to nurture the vision of planting churches in unreached areas of the West African city. (Bp photo courtesy of IMB)

BIBL I O C I P H E R

LOS WC QLZS MONE NWCB, MONE PEM
ZN ZQ UZICO NE XOER NWC BPQNCHP
EV NWC XZOUSEB EV UES: DMN MONE
NWCB NWLN LHC RZWNEMN, LAA
NWCQC NWZOUQ LHC SEOC ZO
GLHLDACQ.

BLHX VEMH: CACICO

Clue: $U = G$

Have fun with cryptography and exercise your Bible knowledge. A King James Version Bible verse has been encoded by letter substitution. The same letter is substituted throughout the puzzle. Solve by trial and error. Answer to last week's puzzle: Luke 15:7

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COURT

cont. from p. 1

intimate and personal aspects of their lives."

Citing the variance in rulings by other federal appeals courts on the issue of same sex marriage, later in the order Graves points out, "...[We] are convinced by the opinions of our sister circuits that 'a detailed and in depth examination of this serious legal issue' is warranted before a disruption of a longstanding status quo."

Graves, a former circuit judge and Supreme Court justice in Mississippi, is a 2010 nominee of U.S. President Barack Obama. He is joined on the three-judge panel hearing the multiple state appeals by Edward C. Prado, a Texan and 2003 nominee of U.S. President George W. Bush, and Priscilla R. Owen, a Texan and 2001 nominee of Bush. Reeves is a 2010 nominee of Obama.

After Reeves' November ruling in Jackson, Jimmy Porter, executive director of the Mississippi Baptist Christian Action Commission, said in part, "What are we as followers of Christ and members of His church to do? First, we must continue to pray. Secondly, it is imperative that we continue to evangelize the whole world regardless of color, race, creed, or sexual orientation."

"What are we as followers of Christ and members of His church to do? First, we must continue to pray. Secondly, it is imperative that we continue to evangelize the whole world regardless of color, race, creed, or sexual orientation."

Jimmy Porter

**executive director
of the Mississippi
Baptist Christian
Action Commission**

"We should never apologize or refrain from declaring that marriage is between a man and a woman. Finally, every word and every action should always be motivated by love for God and love for His creation."

The amendment swept away by Reeves was approved by Mississippi voters in 2004 by a 72% margin (86%-14%). The amendment was codified as Article XIV, Section 263A of the Mississippi Constitution.

Need a light?

Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness but will have the light of life." (John 8:12)

Simply share the following prayer with God in your own words:

1. Lord, I admit that I need you. (I have sinned.)
2. I want forgiveness for my sins and freedom from eternal death. (I repent.)
3. I believe Jesus died and rose from the grave to forgive my sins and to restore my relationship with you. (I believe in Jesus.)
4. By faith, I invite Jesus Christ into my life. From this time on, I want to live in a loving relationship with Him. (I receive Christ as my Savior and Lord.)

"But as many as received him, to them he gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in his name." (John 1:12)

If you make a decision for Christ today, contact a local Southern Baptist church for spiritual guidance.

FLORIDA

cont. from p. 1

County Sheriff's deputies at a mobile home park about two blocks from the church, the Bradenton Herald reported.

On Dec. 4, officers responded to a shooting at Bayshore Church in Bradenton and discovered that pastor Tripp Battle, 31, had been fatally shot. While investigating at the church, deputies learned of other victims at a residence in Bradenton. They found the suspect's wife, Amber Avalos, and the suspect's neighbor, Denise Potter, both deceased in the house.



AMBER AVALOS

Amber Avalos was the nursery and children's director at Bayshore Church, and the alleged shooter's wife. E.W. "Karp" Carpenter, a member of the church since the 1950s, told the Herald that Amber Avalos "was a quiet person who did a great job with our children."

Officials from the Manatee County Sheriff's Office said that the two crime scenes "are obviously connected" and that there were three people at Bayshore

Church at the time of the shooting, including the shooter.

Battle is survived by his wife Joy, who is listed on Bayshore Church's website as the church secretary, and their two children. Earlier reports indicated Joy Battle witnessed her husband's shooting.

Carpenter said that Battle "was a great pastor" and that the church grew from 30 members to more than 100 members under his leadership. The pastor "would give you the shirt off his back," Carpenter said.

Battle is the son-in-law of Keith Johnson, pastor of Way-side Church in Miami.

First Church of Orange Park, Fla., has launched a campaign to raise money for the Battle family. "Pastor Tripp did not have life insurance," First Church said on its website. "Therefore, there is a very real need for financial help for Joy and the children at this time. If you feel led to give to this pastor's wife, you can do so here. We will collect gifts through Dec. 31 and after the first of the year will send a check for the total amount to Joy Battle for her to use as she needs."

More than 420 people have died in incidents involving deadly force at churches and other faith-based organizations in America since 1999, church security expert Carl Chinn reported in a 2013 issue of SBC

LIFE, the journal of the Southern Baptist Convention Executive Committee.

The article recommended ways churches can protect themselves against violent intruders. Among the recommendations:

■ Form a security ministry team to assess security needs throughout the week and during Sunday activities.

■ Assess security risks like entry doors without a greeter to monitor access on Sunday or a receptionist to monitor access during the week. Include unsecured children's areas and doors that remain unlocked at night where intruders can slip in and hide.

■ Formulate plans for evacuating and/or locking down buildings in the event of a violent intruder.

■ Consider hiring off-duty police officers or a security company to provide armed security during church events.

Editor's note: A seven-part series on church security written by the late Chester L. Quarles, professor emeritus of criminal justice and homeland security at the University of Mississippi, and published in The Baptist Record in 2011-12, can be requested from baptistrecord@mbcb.org. Electronic version only.

YEC

cont. from p. 1

will also perform.

YEC kicks off at 1:30 p.m. on Dec. 29, and concludes at 12:30 p.m. on Dec. 30. Participants can attend one or both

days. Cost is \$15 per person, and can be paid at the door on the days of the event. Pastors attend free.

Fellowship of Christian Athletes and First Priority will be available before and after each session to answer questions and provide re-

sources to help students reach their friends and campuses for Christ, Lum said.

For more information, contact the MBCB Evangelism Department at (601) 292-3278 or toll-free outside Jackson (800) 748-1651 ext. 278. E-mail: lburris@mbcb.org.

Submission Guidelines

The Baptist Record is pleased to publish news and photographs of special events that take place in cooperating churches of the Mississippi Baptist Convention. News items and/or photographs depicting benefits and activities for secular or outside organizations will not be published.

Preferred method: news may be submitted electronically to the e-mail address below, and must be included in the message segment of an e-mail form. Secondary method: news may be typewritten or neatly printed on 8 1/2 by 11-inch paper and mailed. All articles must be received in writing; no articles will be accepted over the telephone. Due to ever-present virus threats, no text attachments will be accepted. Photograph attachments in JPEG format are permissible.

Please make articles concise. Include the who, what, when, where details of the story, along with a contact person's address and telephone number.

Photographs must be submitted electronically

via e-mail, as attachments in JPEG format. Hard copy photographs mailed through the postal service will not be accepted. Photographs must be clear, sharp, and well-lighted. Photographs must depict people. No landscape, building, or object-only photographs will be printed. Photographs containing inappropriate gestures and objectionable clothing will not be published. Cell phone photographs and other low resolution items that do not reproduce well on newsprint are generally not publishable.

There is no guarantee that news items and/or photographs will be published, and unsolicited material will not be acknowledged or returned. All news items are subject to editing, and all photographs are subject to cropping. News items and/or photographs can be published one time only. Deadline for submitting news is one week prior to requested publication date. Articles that are not date-sensitive will be published on a space-available basis. These guidelines are not meant to be exhaustive.

Submit news to The Baptist Record, P.O. Box 530, Jackson, MS 39205-0530. FAX: (601) 292-3330. E-mail: baptistrecord@mbcb.org.

THE VILLAGE VIEW



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GIFTS OF HONOR AND MEMORY

A portion of The Village View is allocated each month to a list of Gifts of Honor and Memory. Many groups and individuals elect to pay tribute to others through this sensitive, meaningful, and helpful medium. This feature is hopefully designed to further honor, with taste and respect, those who are and have been special to our special families.

SEPTEMBER 2014

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 Bible Study

God Provides Deliverance • Esther 4:6-17

In Greek, unlike English, the noun "time" can be two different words: *chronos* or *kairos*. *Chronos* designates quantity, measurements like "minute" or "month." *Kairos* designates quality, what you and I would recognize as THE moment (e.g., Ec. 3:1-8).

Chapters three, eight, and nine in the Book of Esther mention three months (*chronos*) of the Jewish calendar: Nisan (March/April), Adar (February/March), and Sivan (May/June). These clues inform the reader that eleven months passed from 3:1 to 9:32. For two months, between Nisan and Sivan, God's people dreaded the thirteenth day of Adar; then, for nine months, between Sivan and Adar, they prepared to defend themselves. On the thirteenth day of Adar, they defeated their enemies.

When, on the thirteenth day of Nisan, Haman's hidden agenda became a royal edict (3:4-15), Mordecai told Esther, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?" (4:14, NASB) The Greek translation of the Old Testament (Septuagint) rightly renders both occurrences of "time" in this verse as *kairos*.

Mordecai realized how dire his people's situation was. Comparatively, God never misses a moment (*kairos*), the reason why he qualifies as the con-

summater deliverer. He can make every event eventful. He can make any moment momentous.

The author of the Book of Esther skillfully narrates the deliverance of Jews throughout the Persian Empire without ever using verbs like "deliver," "rescue," or "save." The verb "escape" (4:13) and the noun "deliverance" (4:14) do appear in our focal passage but nowhere else in the Book of Esther. The Hebrew noun, translated "deliver-

ance," derives from a verb that denotes both kinds of deliverance: rescue from enemies, troubles, or death (physical) and rescue from sin or guilt (spiritual).

1. To deliver requires precise timing.

Domino's served its first pizzas to the residents of Ypsilanti, Michigan, in 1960. The company eventually distinguished itself with an audacious delivery guarantee, "30 minutes or it's free." Founder Thomas Monaghan discontinued that guarantee after a St. Louis jury awarded \$79 million to plaintiff Jean Kinder on December 17, 1993. Years earlier (1989), she had suffered head and spinal injuries when a

reckless Domino's delivery driver ran a red light and collided with her car.

Delivering a timely pizza proved to be too difficult for Domino's, but delivering a people from genocide was effortless for God. The Book of Esther, without fanfare, records four instances of precise timing. First, Ahasuerus extended favor to Esther even though she had trespassed (4:10-11; 5:1-2). Why did he focus on her beauty rather than her breach of protocol? Was it

not seeing his queen for a month (4:10) or the three-day fast (4:15-5:1)? Second, a bout of insomnia prompted

Ahasuerus to order a reading of the court records (6:1-3); pages and pages of minutia. They, being boring, should have induced drowsiness, but a royal attendant somehow picked the most fascinating excerpt to read. Third, Mordecai's heroics (2:21-23) saved his life because they had been forgotten for years. Fourth, Haman arrived at the royal palace immediately after (not before) Ahasuerus learned how honorable Mordecai had been (6:1-5). A well-deserved but long overdue recognition thus thwarted Haman's plan to execute Mordecai (6:6-13). Any of

these instances could be mislabeled a "coincidence." We who know God know better.

2. To deliver requires toughness.

The United States Postal Service has no official motto. Nonetheless, in New York City, the James A. Farley Post Office Building displays a pledge that has been chiseled above its entrance: "Neither snow nor rain nor heat nor gloom of night stays these couriers from the swift completion of their appointed rounds." Those words, penned by the Greek historian Herodotus, originally referred to the courier service of the Persian Empire.

The United States Postal Service knows firsthand that delivery isn't always simple. God does too. According to the Book of Esther, formidable foes had imperiled his people. The haters were powerful, none more prominent than Haman (3:1-6; 5:11). He himself paid 10,000 talents of silver (3:7-11) to massacre the Jews. That sum of money amounted to a third of the national budget of ancient Persia (Reidar Bjornard, "Esther," The Broadman Bible Commentary, 11). The haters were everywhere: 800 in Susa (9:1-15) and an additional 75,000 throughout the provinces (9:16). Against such odds the Jews, with God, prevailed.

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Explore the Bible

with Ivan Parke

The Shelter of God's Salvation • Psalm 27:1-6

When you were a child did you ever build a fort? Perhaps it was a large blanket thrown over the kitchen table. Maybe it was a treehouse with a sign "no girls allowed" painted across the door. My fort was made out of twine and sticks wrapped around a grouping of trees next to the creek bank. It is believed David, the author of Psalm 27, penned this during a time when he was running away from Absalom, fleeing Jerusalem. His fort was found under the shelter of God's salvation.

Psalm 27 could be called An Exuberant Declaration of Faith, A Psalm of Fearless Trust in God, or simply Stronghold. David's confidence and the high priority he placed in worshipping God is evident. Powerful verses when the enemy is attacking and you are waiting. Whatever the title, this Psalm is rich and warrants a thoughtful and diligent study in its entirety.

The LORD...is...my, the same beginning as Psalm 23, but here we have another descriptive name: "He is my light and my salvation." Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will not walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12 ESV). "Salvation finds us in the dark, but it does not leave us there. It gives light to those who sit in the valley of the shadow of death. After conver-

sion, God is our joy, comfort, guide, teacher, and in every sense our light. He is light within, light around, light reflected, and light to be revealed. It is not said that the Lord gives light, but that He is light; not that He gives salvation, but that He is salvation. Those who by faith have laid hold of God have all the covenant blessings" (Charles H. Spurgeon, Treasury of David). This is the reason why we should not fear.

Also, at this sacred season the whole purpose of His coming was to bring us salvation. Have you seen the Light and experienced His salvation?

The second part of Psalm 27:1, "The LORD is the stronghold of my life." The word "stronghold" comes from the Hebrew word (Old Testament) "Ma'uz" and it means: A fortified place; figuratively, a fort, a rock, strength (Strong's Concordance #4581). The word, if used in the positive tense refers to God's protection of us. If it is used in the negative tense

it means to be in the grip of sin or unbiblical thinking. The LORD is my fort (Nahum 1:7). He, being my stronghold, removes my fear, therefore I will not be afraid.

In the next two verses, notice the circumstances David is describing: "when evildoers assail me," "though an army encamp against me," and "though war arise against me." Perhaps David stopped dead in his tracks, surveyed the situation, and with a defying shout said, "yet I will be confident." What are you facing today? Where is

your confidence? Run to His fortress! "The LORD is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer, my God, my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold" (Psalm 18:2).

The final portion of our Scripture focuses on David's number one desire and priority. "One thing have I asked of the LORD, that will I seek after; that I may dwell in the house of the

LORD all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the LORD and to inquire in his temple (vs. 4)." "What does it mean to live in God's presence?" asks Nancy Leigh DeMoss in her book *A Thirty Day Walk with God in the Psalms*. This was her definition: "To be so consumed by who He is, His character, and then to live intentionally" (See Psalm 27:8, Phil. 3:10-14). Christmas is a time when we celebrate the glory of His presence.

Commenting on verse 5, Spurgeon notes, "He will give me the best shelter in the worst of danger." In your Bible, underline the phrases which begin with he will—hide, conceal, and lift. What an encouragement to know we have a place to run to for protection. Then in verse six David, with the same exuberant shout of confidence, David lifts up his head and with "sacrifices with shouts of joy" proclaims, "I will sing and make melody to the LORD." It was an intentional choice to choose to trust God, walk by faith and not by fear. "Cast me not off; forsake me not, O God of my salvation" (Psalm 27:9b)! Is this your choice as well?

Daily Dwell on the Word: Psalm 27:13, 14

Leathers is a member of First Church, Madison.

Bible Studies for Life

with Laura Leathers



Fishers of men making impact on Ecuador lostness

LAGARTO, Ecuador (BP) — Amadeo Torres took Jesus' command in Matthew 4:19 literally: "Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men."

When contemplating how to share the Gospel with an unbelieving friend in an Ecuadorian fishing village, Amadeo asked International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Johnny Maust to help him buy a fisherman's net for the friend. In return for the net, the fisherman continues to give Torres and Maust a portion of his yield of shrimp and lobster.

Torres and Maust, his key church-planting partner, began visiting Luis Quintero each Sunday afternoon at his hillside home overlooking the waterway he fishes in his canoe-sized boat. They concentrated on sharing the Gospel of Matthew with him.

In addition to their personalized example of a fisherman's net, Maust brought a DVD of the story of Matthew to show the Quintero family, along with other books of the Gospel.

Quintero says the Word of God had an effect on him, and that's why he has placed his faith in Christ. His 12-year-old son Marlon followed suit. Marlon's mother, however, is holding back from making a similar decision, waiting to see if Quintero's newfound faith in Christ results in him becoming a better man.

That's why Torres and Maust return to visit the home each week, to disciple the family about what it truly means to follow Christ. "Amadeo's introduced me to a lot of people in the area I wouldn't have known otherwise," Maust says.

When Maust met Yoryi (pronounced Georgie) Cortez, a community leader in the

town of Lagarto where Maust and his wife Donna hope to guide U.S. partnering churches to plant a church, the missionary knew Cortez was "a person of peace."

Cortez is not a Christian but has agreed to participate in and possibly host a Bible study. "Your groups are different than others [religious groups] who come here," Cortez tells Maust about the U.S. partnering churches.

"That's why I accepted your invitation to Bible study. Other groups come in and preach to us. You don't come in with [preaching] fear but with friendship. Your churches come in doing something for the community."

Cortez owns a discotec (music/dance club) on the first floor of where his mother Gloria lives, a few houses away from him. In her second-story home, U.S. church groups have eaten many a meal prepared by members of a weekly cooking class Donna Maust teaches.

"If you want to use my home, you are welcome," Gloria tells Johnny during an English-as-a-Second-Language certificate ceremony led by ESL teachers from Great Hills Church in Austin, Texas.

The Mausts envision the rectangular dance floor of the discotec converted into a venue to show the JESUS film, teach Bible studies, and eventually house a church of new believers.

"They are recognizing we are here to share the love of God," Donna says. "When problems come in people's lives, they know they can rely on our friendship to give them guidance, to talk with them about God and to pray together."



NEWFOUND FAITH — Demetrio and Mary Silverio study their Bibles at night after coming home from work. That was a sight that their son used to never see, but now is an everyday occurrence since both parents have come to know Jesus Christ as Lord. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)

Finding Jesus creates stirring family story

SANTO DOMINGO, Dominican Republic (BP) — Growing up in a rural part of the Dominican Republic, Mary wanted to move to the nearest city at age 18 to find work. When a woman offered to help, Mary thought it was too good to be true. It was.

Mary assumed she would become a maid when she arrived at a house in the city, but it was a house of prostitution. "A man came on to me. 'Would you do something for me?' he said. 'What do you mean?' I asked. 'Do you have something to offer me?' he said. 'You have to do something for me.'"

"I wasn't going to do it," Mary recalls of being propositioned. "The women working there asked me, 'Why did you think that woman brought you here?' I was ignorant of these things. I've never been with a man, I told them."

They let Mary stay in a little room that could be locked so no one could get in and then helped her escape. She found work as a caregiver for a person who was crippled, and then as a maid. That was when she met Demetrio Silverio, her future husband. As a way to meet her, he asked her for an extra mint she put on pillows.

After a little more than a week, he took her to meet his family.

The couple has been married 23 years and has two sons and two daughters, but it hasn't been smooth sailing for the couple. For years, Demetrio spent the money he earned each day on rum to drink with his friends.

"I drank a lot every day," Demetrio recalls. "I liked to be drunk." Mary didn't, and she

didn't like it when he drank either. She found solace at a nearby church that she attended without Demetrio.

"I would come home from a church service around 11 p.m. and have to sleep outside with the dog because he was inside drunk," Mary recalls.

International Mission Board (IMB) missionary Carlos Llambes, pastor of the church at the time, and his wife Lily saw Mary as a sad person when they first met her.

"I used to ask her, 'How is your husband?' and she would always respond, 'At home, drunk.' It was really weighing on her," Llambes said. "One day, I felt compelled to go and talk to him."

"When I met Demetrio, he was drunk. He's a tall man that could look right over me. To get his attention, I pushed him hard on the chest and told him, 'Hey, I'm coming to talk to you tomorrow. Be ready. That means, be sober so you'll understand what I'm going to say to you.'"

The next day Demetrio ran when he saw Llambes coming. "I was getting ready to get drunk," Demetrio recalls. "I had a bottle of rum in my back pocket."

Llambes followed Carlos down the street to his house. "Craning my head up to meet his eyes, I asked him, 'Do you understand what Christ is about? You need to change your life. The only way to do that is through Jesus Christ,'" Llambes recalls.

"I explained to him... what Christianity really meant. He repented in tears. He told me, 'I want to be obedient to God's Word. I want to be baptized.'"

As Demetrio tells it, "Car-

los led me to Christ right there, with a bottle in my back pocket. When Carlos left, I threw it out. It was a very emotional day. I felt it all the way from my toes to my head. Thank God, I've never been the same. I haven't had a drink since that day."

Carlos baptized the tall Dominican, both on their knees in a kid-size inflatable pool that began to leak.

"By the time I lowered him into the water, his belly was sticking out from the remaining water in the pool," Llambes says, "so the congregation began shaking the pool back and forth to create waves that washed across Demetrio's belly to make sure he was covered with water. The whole church baptized him. It was such a wonderful turning point in his life."

"He has become the provider that his family needed. He's one of the men in the church that we rely on to disciple others. I take him out house to house, evangelizing. He asks for stacks of tracts to give out to people he encounters during the day."

Demetrio talks with people in his hometown about the Gospel and wants to start a church there. "Now, I pray for my family, that they always walk in the Lord. Carlos and Lily, we will always have them in our hearts," he says tearfully.

"We pray that the Lord will help us continue in the work," Mary says, "that wherever God takes us, we'll have an impact on people as the church here has done, that we show the same love for people as they've shown us here. Carlos and Lily have been a testimony to our family."



TESTIFYING TO FAITH — In Ecuador, International Mission Board missionary Johnny Maust (left) reads from God's Word to new believers Luis (left) and Marlon (right) while the women of the family listen, waiting to see how the father and son will be changed by their new faith in Christ. (BP photo courtesy of IMB)